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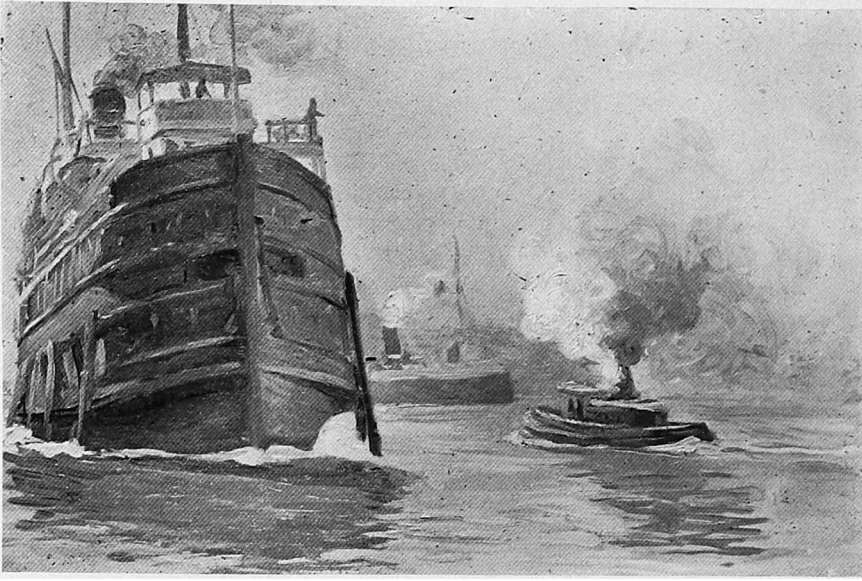
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AN EXCURSION STEAMER LEAVING THE RIVER, BY A. FLEURY

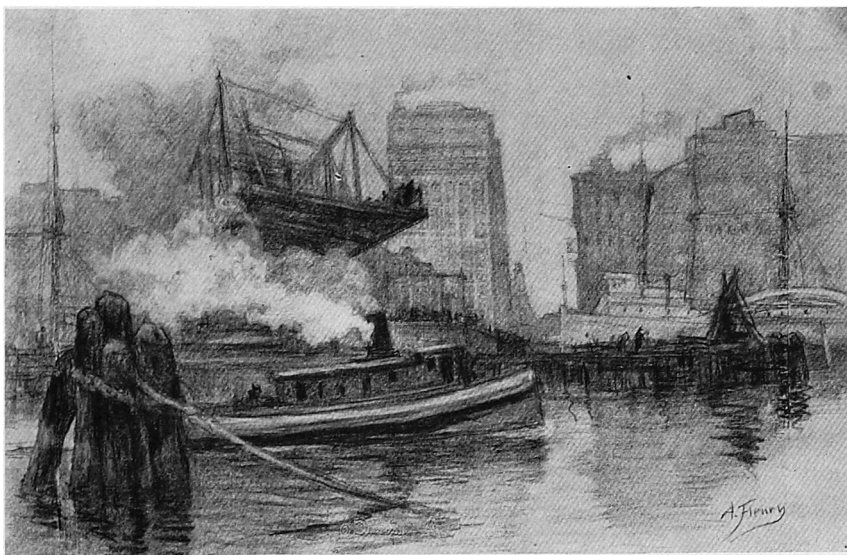
PICTURESQUE CHICAGO

For several years I have put into paintings the many impressions daily felt in my study of Chicago in its different aspects, but I did not then attempt to analyze my sensations. It was not until lately that a necessity for this analysis began to be felt, as I was obliged to answer the questions put to me every day, "Why do artists who visit the city of Chicago find it so strange, so picturesque, and why do we who live in it and see it all the time receive but an ordinary impression—a sensation of gloominess in the presence of the many begrimed walls and the thick vari-colored smoke?"

The quality of these impressions depends largely upon the greater or lesser development of our sensibilities, or in our greater or lesser practice in the art of seeing. Every one is born with a certain faculty or sense more highly developed than any other, and when by good fortune he is enabled to cultivate it by making it "vibrate" every day, the result is its superiority over that of the majority, its higher cultivation bringing into his memory thousands of recollections which by constant comparison enables him to color his illustrations, whether painted or written.

Comparing things with one another, arranging them in groups, thereby finding for them their true position, constitutes an artistic work, so that he who reads or looks at the result of our labors is

unconsciously led to a comparison of association of ideas which causes him to see through our eyes. If the impression becomes deeper, if the onlooker has seen a great deal, and retained this knowledge, we have accomplished our end. Perhaps a simple example would more quickly express this truth. Take, for instance, one of the most characteristic structures of Chicago, the Masonic Temple. To express an idea of its height, if we give a cold mathematical description of its height in figures, the number of its stones, its many windows, as a lawyer fills out a lease, we would have a truthful document, because



THE STATE STREET BRIDGE, WITH THE MASONIC TEMPLE, BY A. FLEURY

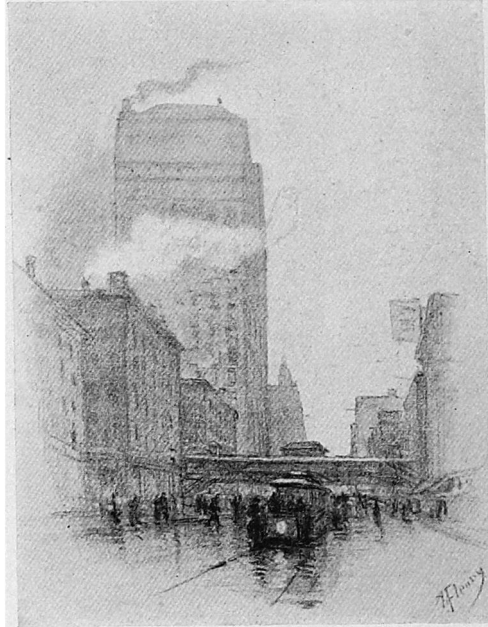
we might reconstruct the building from its statements, but we would be far from a true realization of its height. If we had never seen such a colossal structure before, it would require a great effort of imagination to realize that it was ten times higher than an ordinary house and twice as high as a church. If, however, the narrator describes this immense structure, and compares it to something great, towering above the crowd, dominating the buildings which surround it; if he compares this mass of granite to a mountain on which twenty-nine different rows of habitations are superimposed one above the other, then you enter in your thoughts the dominion of queer things, where you can imagine the thousands of persons actively working in the hundreds of offices making up these stories, and in fancy you see the thousands of cells which form a beehive, that emblem of work and

activity; and if imagination could cause you to realize that if this world of workers, six or seven thousand in all, should all try to get out at once, shoving one another through the narrow doors of this vast hive, they would appear to one's eyes, in comparison with the immense mass of the building, like a swarm of ants, escaping and running away from some old tree-trunk.

Thus an author by a comparison of memories creates a succession of pictures, which without altering facts has succeeded in conveying the impression of an object of size and filled with character. In French there is a proverb that says, "Truth is not always the best thing to say." In art it should never be literally said, but should always be framed and colored. Take this same example, and attempt to render the size of this building in painting or drawing. Our resources would not be so numerous, and the comparisons less striking; yet to depict its surroundings we must belittle what is too large in its immediate vicinity, diminish what is small, as it alone is our principal subject in the picture, and yet we do not leave the limits of truth. So we may put a veil of smoke across any building that struggles for equal supremacy of height with the principal one, as smoke is one of the greatest realities in Chicago.

We can diminish in size the surroundings, the buildings, the elevated trains, the cable-cars, the people, without exaggerating; and we can equally well cut the height of the façade with a white vapor, to dissipate the monotony of its vertical face, making it compare with a mountain whose crest looms up above the clouds.

Chicago is full of such examples; her river, her harbor-mouth, her streets, are all quite different from those seen elsewhere. The reason for this is plain: Chicago is new, having at one blow expressed modern ideas of progress, and for this reason is different from the other cities which have existed for years, and even centuries, and to which



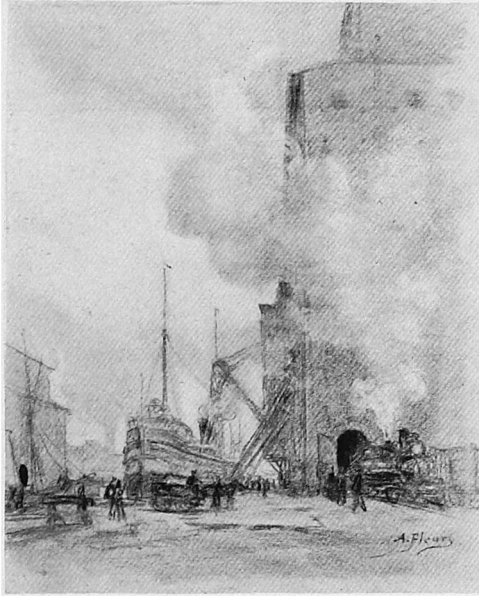
THE MASONIC TEMPLE AND THE ELEVATED ROAD, BY A. FLEURY

each day brings few items of this progress. Their aspect always resembles superimposed additions, and never conveys the idea of a whole created by a single desire.

If that illustrator so fertile in imagination, Gustave Doré, had known Chicago, I am convinced that he would have found many strange and interesting illustrations. In his fancy, at night especially, the tugs on the river would have assumed diabolical forms, and he would have depicted them as marine monsters, straining their three

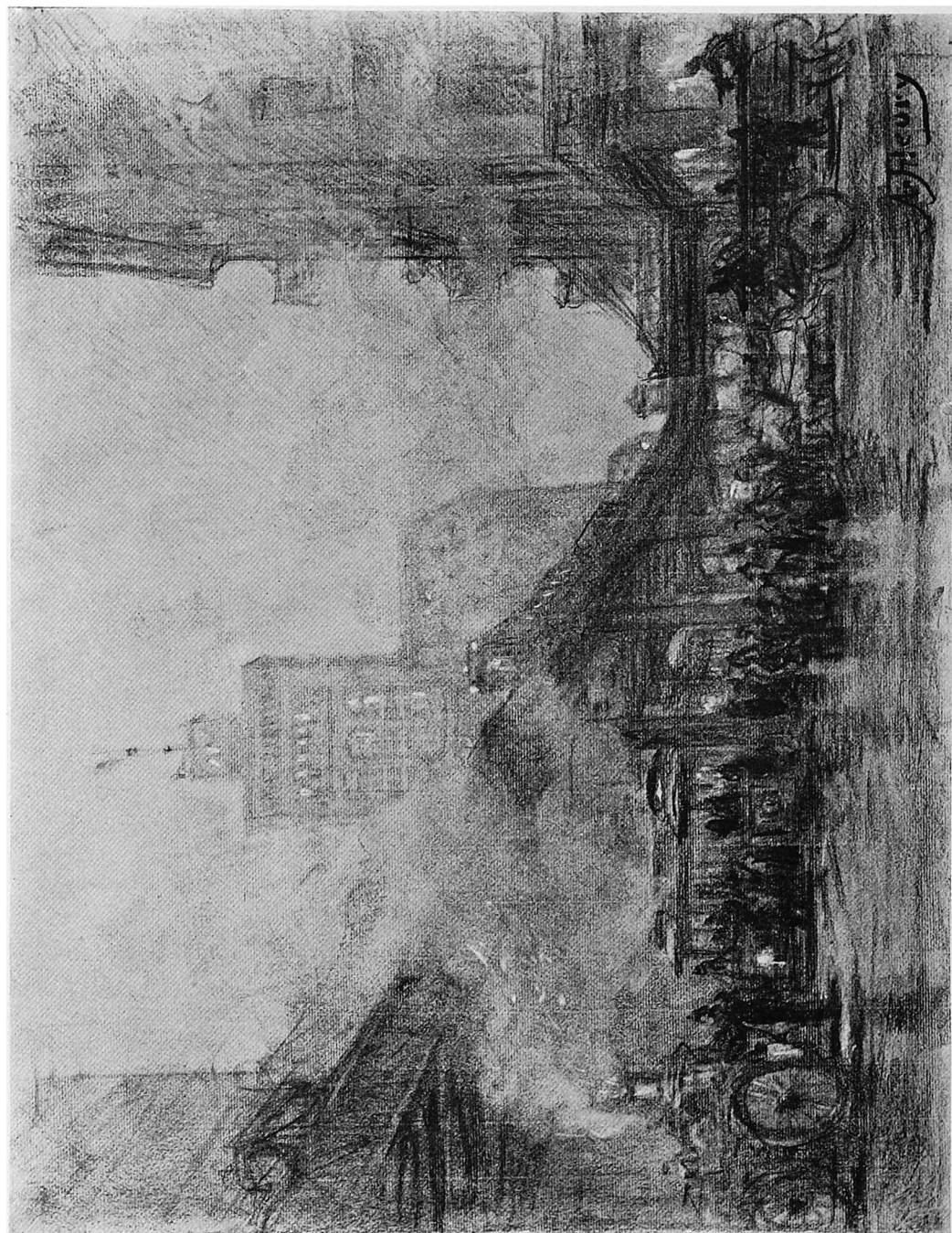
large eyes, so luminous in the darkness, and hauling after them in mad haste floating mansions, struggling, panting like oxen, whistling and vomiting queer smoke as did the monsters in fable.

Chicago, when taken up in its maritime, industrial, and commercial aspects, offers various picturesque surprises. We see it in sunlight and in rain, in the evening, gay as an Italian city, serious as a city of business, bustling as an industrial center. To my mind no other city so clearly shows these three great qualities, nor is so fittingly situated to carry them on. It is as though one man had made a plan for the whole, and carried



GRAIN ELEVATORS, BY A. FLEURY

it to completion. A few points of comparison with other cities will show Chicago to be one of the most characteristic in the world, and a typical American production of the nineteenth century. In the large ports of the world their composition and character is acquired from the combination of three different elements, the entry (port) of the sea or river, the city proper, and the manufacturing district, the latter usually situated on the outskirts. The city, or center, where there are houses, stores, offices, studios, forms in itself an important position. The public monuments, and above all the churches, with their steeples and clock-towers, lend an air of gayety and give artistic accents. The wharfs are pleasant to look upon, where one finds hotels and official buildings, such as the custom-house and arsenal. In Venice, especially, the architecture



WABASH AVENUE, LOOKING SOUTH, WITH AUDITORIUM TOWER, BY A. FLEURY

plays so important a part decoratively that one can almost fancy himself surrounded by scenes in a theater; while the numerous sailing-vessels arriving from the orient are so beautiful, with their large painted sails, they seem as though especially made to ornament the picture. In a country of such sunshine and palaces everything appears enchanted, and against one's will one loses all thought of business.

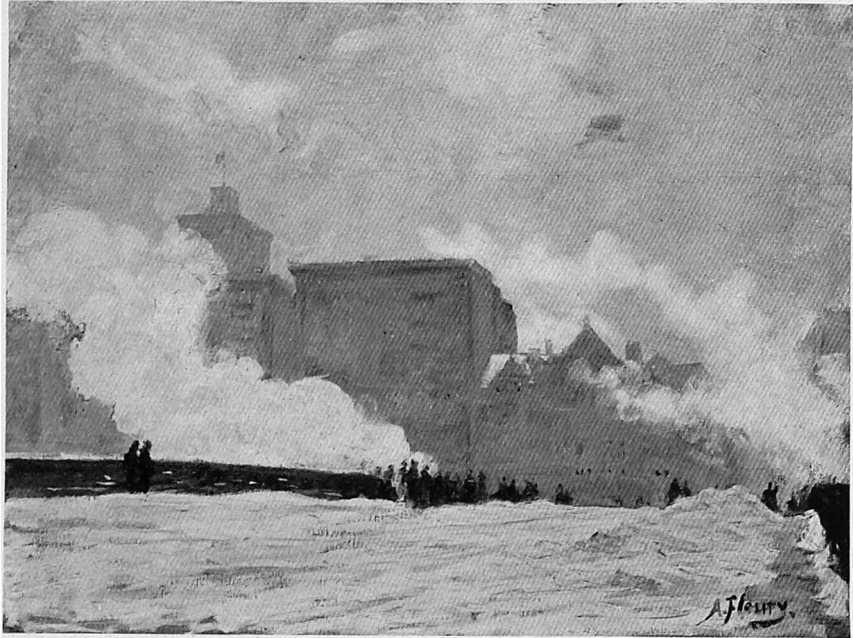
In the north of France, in Normandy, we have a river port really much to be admired from an artistic point of view, outside of its commercial importance. This is Rouen, where, like Chicago, the river adds to the life and activity of the city. The city is of first importance, with the manufacturing portion at a distance which does not tend to convey any aspect of labor. The wharfs of the river are walks bordered with trees, where the world of fashion promenades to music, while the sounds of toil come but dimly. In such cities one observes and admires the landscape, but the idea of how the piles of merchandise on the wharfs is to be disposed of is never roused.

The impression made on a traveler entering Chicago is unique, especially in the vicinity of the river. Coming directly from Europe, one is immediately struck with the serious aspect of the scene passing before one's eyes. The heart of the city has no steeples, no clock-towers, because one only comes into this part of town on business; the houses and homes are in the suburbs, as are also the churches, for at evening one desires well-merited repose. The city and stores which form Chicago, so to speak, are dark from the smoke which perpetually covers them, and this gloomy ensemble is only dissipated by thousands of electric lights, which burn even at midday, so dark it is. Some flaring advertisements, or names painted in white on large chimneys, try to enliven the surroundings, but even they quickly pass to dinginess. The water is so thick and muddy that the fine white cloud-masses are reflected in it as on a blackened ground. No trees line the wharfs, or for that matter could exist on any of the streets. Far indeed are we from Venice, for we feel we are in the presence of a city of activities, and as we prefer it, clothed with its garb of toil.

The European is also struck with the strange sight of the lake vessels, with their great roofs piled one above the other. The usual height of the sides above water, the captain's cabin built like a miniature house, all constitute a veritable floating island, slowly and gravely passing down the narrow river. When Besnard, the successful architect of the Hirst competition, stopped to visit in Chicago on his way to California, he received the same impressions as I have described. When standing between two large stones bordering the river, he saw one of the huge buildings looming up high above the old city, he said he found himself in a new country, and well understood how natural and logical it was to fly from this inferno of activity

every night in order to get a glimpse of trees and grass, to find one's home, where the troubles of the day might be forgotten.

Goose Island is a striking point. The great coal-elevators, where every few moments the numerous tugs repair for their daily diet, give an impression of great maritime activity. This is the smokiest corner of Chicago. One can hardly distinguish the world about him, or untangle the framework of derricks which cross like the branches of trees. The tugs' white plumes of steam identify them. All this



A WINTER EVENING ON THE VIADUCT, BY A. FLEURY

darkling disorder is rendered still more strange when seen reflected in the murky water; the many queer shapes assume a greenish hue, and turn and twist in a most fantastic manner. Boutet de Monvel, the gentle artist of France, was deeply impressed. He found all the noise, the ceaseless activity of the cable-cars, the elevated road, brutal, immense, overwhelming; they gave him the feeling of a nightmare. To him Wabash Avenue in rainy and windy weather was a veritable trial of the infernal regions. The sky is of iron, and perpetually growls a rolling thunder; electric lights are emitting burning sparks; below are wagons of every size and kind, whose approach cannot be heard in the midst of the noises; and the cars, with jangling voices

which never cease, cross and recross; and finally the rain, with a wind too strong for an umbrella! It is just possible the fire department appears on the scene to complete one's demoralization.

There are gay-looking places in Chicago, such as yacht clubs, with their small harbors full of dainty crafts; excursion steamers, with their happy parties going and coming, with sounds of music wafted on a summer's breeze. With what fascination do the busy people look on the reddish brown bridges as they slowly turn to make a passage for the heavily laden freight steamers; a green tug, alternately pushing and pulling, puts the spot of vivid color into the picture, and the old red or grayish brick walls of the buildings make the framework and are reflected in the troubled water.

I fear the majority pass every day and fail to observe the mellowness and harmony of the common things about them. Perhaps one carelessly glances at the high dumping-ground on the lake front and sees nothing picturesque. It is all there, however—the pale pink or blue sky meeting the blue water, purple of hue toward the far-distant horizon. The piles of dirt are full of color—blue, yellow, red, lavender, as well as the fundamental brown of the soil. Wagons, horses, and drivers in busy groups, with a man or two sitting on a log, or by a fire, in the foreground, make an interesting and unique composition of city life.

Over in the poverty-stricken districts of flat prairie and dull gray frame houses we find much artistic material. On a rickety sidewalk a group of school children in their vari-colored clothes, a passing street-car, and an old fence. What a study in color! A washtub is a prosaic enough thing in itself, but becomes a picturesque adjunct if it has proper surroundings. In a poorly lighted room a common wooden bench holds a dull yellow tub; a woman rinses a cloth from the prismatic soapsuds; her faded blue calico dress is an artist's color, and makes a fine contrast to the yellow tub and the sparkling water. Put a pinafoored, out-at-the-toes youngster in the foreground, where a shaft of light falls upon him, and the commonness of the tub, the cheapness of the material, is gone.

In the streets on a winter night, with the snow softly falling, the thousands hurry to their homes, passing brilliantly lighted shop windows, with the great black building towering above. In this hurry a woman waits by a fruit-stand, with its many colored wares; the queer brown foreign face of an old Italian is seen in the strong light of an oil-torch as he holds out his hand for change. This picturesque side of the city is as surprising to many as are the activity, the high buildings, the river interests, to others; and so the largeness of all makes a surprise equal to his who stands for the first time before the pyramids.

A. FLEURY.